

Published: Saturday, July 24, 2004

172nd Street bridge is a go

Things look good for plans to replace the congested I-5 overpass at Smokey Point.

*By Lukas Velush
Herald Writer*

At long last, let the bridge be built.

The last pile of cash needed for a new I-5 overpass on 172nd Street NE in Smokey Point fell into place Friday. Construction on the \$9 million bridge is now expected to begin in four to six weeks.

Supporters of a wider bridge were sent scrambling about six weeks ago when the lowest bid for the project came in \$2 million higher than expected.

Both Arlington and Marysville view widening the bridge as crucial to improving response to police and fire emergencies and to accommodating business growth.

The current two-lane bridge constricts traffic and creates delays when drivers try to get on and off the freeway during rush hour. A six-lane bridge is expected to alleviate the congestion until surrounding roads can be rebuilt and expanded sometime in the future.

"This project needed to go ahead, and it needed to go now," said Steve Gorcester, executive director of the state Transportation Improvement Board.

His agency on Friday kicked in the remaining money that was needed when it agreed to raise its contribution from \$3 million to \$3.7 million. The board uses state gasoline tax revenue to fund transportation projects.

In recent weeks, Arlington, Marysville, the state Department of Transportation and Congress all agreed to increase the amount they are contributing as well.

The bridge is key to the area's growth, said Becky Foster, co-chairwoman of a group of business owners and community leaders who led the bid to fund the new bridge.

"We have water, sewer, flat land," Foster said. "We're getting noticed. We're ready to go."

Marysville Mayor Dennis Kendall's reaction to the news was straightforward.

"Hot damn!" he said. "Let's get this thing moving. I'm ready for the groundbreaking."

Arlington City Council member Sally Lien said she was glad that fight is finally over. The project faced many challenges, and higher-than-anticipated bids were just one of the problems.

"It's just been such a vast ordeal," Lien said. "We've pretty well slowed down building anything out there in Smokey Point and at the west end of the (Arlington) airport."

U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Wash., said he was relieved that everything came together without having to put the project out to bid again, which could have delayed the project for months.

"Just weeks ago, Marysville and Arlington both reached deep into their pockets and invested more dollars into the 172nd Street overpass," he said.

"Now that the state has filled the final funding gap, we can move forward on this critical transportation project that will bolster economic growth and create jobs in northern Snohomish County."

Reporter Lukas Velush: 425-339-3449 or lvelush@heraldnet.com

State transportation board OKs Smokey Point money

The state Transportation Improvement Board has approved the final \$700,000 expected to be needed to allow funding for the expansion of the Smokey Point interchange.

The board last week unanimously approved the increase, said Steve Gorcester, the board's executive director.

The approval brings the full amount of the board funding to \$3.7 million, providing the final increment needed to allow work to proceed. The total project cost is \$9.1 million.

The project calls for rebuilding a bridge over Interstate 5 at 172nd Street Northeast to allow better access to southbound I-5 and to ease traffic jams in the Smokey Point area. The work is to be done by about October 2005.

Mukilteo Beacon

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YOUR HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

Local News

Harbour Reach extension on horizon

Rebecca Carr

Your destination is right within view, just yards ahead – all that stands in the way are a couple of maddeningly slow traffic signals and a few hundred other motorists who want to get there just as badly as you do.

Short of a bone-jarring, suspension-destroying off-road trip through Picnic Point Creek, there isn't much to do but grit your teeth and fantasize that if you pull back on the steering wheel, your vehicle can fly.

But if the city gets its wish, motorists will eventually have a better option. Public Works Director Tom Hansen presented three proposals for the Harbour Reach extension on the west side of SR 525 which would connect Beverly Park Road directly to Harbour Pointe Boulevard South, taking traffic off of the Speedway and saving two time-consuming – and often dangerous – left turns.

If all of the various elements fall together seamlessly, construction could begin as early as 2008 he said, emphasizing that it's an optimistic timeline.

Each alternative has its pluses and minuses, and each has its own cost factors.

Much of the first alternative involves using an existing roadway built by Boeing for access to its formally bustling Harbour Pointe location.

"One of the significant benefits to Alternative 1 is that the majority of the road is already built," Hansen said of the city's preferred option.

Its downside though, is that it requires a bridge over Picnic Pointe Creek, and as Hansen said, bridges are often the most expensive part of the project.

The other alternatives however, would require the city to not only build more road, but acquire more right-of-way which in itself can carry a high price tag.

The second option requires buying right of way and still requires a bridge, and the third option could require

significant grading changes on Cyrus Way which could effectively render surrounding property useless, Hansen said.

Right now, visibility is too limited on that road to safely bring in more traffic, Hansen explained. The city would have to flatten out the hills and fill in the dips.

"It becomes an issue if you change the grade so much you can't build a driveway, you'd have to buy the parcel if it's damaged beyond use," he said.

The project admittedly still has a few kinks to work out. For example, it could add significantly more traffic to a single-family residential development near the area. Hansen said he's working with the county to minimize those possibilities.

Hansen said that in order to compete for various funding, the city must look at a range of alternatives for a project, regardless of how viable those alternatives may be.

"We looked at the shortest distance between the two roads for about two seconds," he said. "But we said, no, we cannot take arterial traffic and put it in a residential neighborhood."

Councilmembers heartily agreed, particularly those who were around during the similar problems and discussions with St. Andrews Drive a few years back. Hansen said the city is already researching a range of funding options.

"The Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) is very interested, but given the preliminary estimate, they don't think they can fully fund it," he said. "We've had informal talks with the highway department and they indicate their support as well, but they're not sitting there checkbook in hand."

Choosing a plan early on is key to securing other funds, he said.

But the city is competing with other funding-starved agencies that are working with existing problems in their areas.

"What we're trying to do is be ahead of the curve, and solve an upcoming problem," he said.

And if the city goes after federal dollars, they come with the caveat of additional environmental studies and biological assessments. Securing permits from those agencies could add a year onto the application process, he said.

After the council formally chooses a plan, the city will secure the funding, then complete the preliminary design in mid-2005.

It expects to secure all of the necessary permits in 2006, complete the right-of-way acquisition by early 2007, then it can begin construction.

THE WENATCHEE WORLD *online*

City pushes ahead with riverfront road plan

By Marco Martinez, World staff writer
Wednesday - August 4, 2004



WENATCHEE — After settling on a route for a new waterfront road that would skirt Riverfront Park and in two spots enter it, the city is trying to find a way to pay for the estimated \$3 million project to connect Worthen Street and Walla Walla Avenue.

Hopes are high that the city's grant application to the state Transportation Improvement Board later this month will be successful, said David Stalheim, city director of community development. The grant would cover up to 80 percent of the cost, with the city and private property owners paying the rest.

The earliest the road would be built is 2006, Stalheim said.

The nearly half-mile stretch of riverfront road is considered the "linchpin" to spur new development, City Councilman Mark Kulaas said Tuesday.

The city's goal, he said, has been to develop a route that limits impact to Riverfront Park and the surrounding area while creating new opportunities for private development.

One of the earlier alternatives considered by the city had the road aligned right along the park boundary north of the ice arena, Kulaas said. That alternative eventually gave way to a route that is farther to the west, which would result in private property flanking the new road in that area, he said.

The route approved by the City Council on July 22 would result in Riverside Drive jutting from Worthen Street just north of the city's wastewater treatment plant. From there, the new road would cut in front of the Riverfront Center office building at the foot of Fifth Street, cross through part of the Island View Street residential area and then continue through the 9th Street Trailer Park before connecting with Walla Walla Avenue at Ninth Street.

"One of the downsides to this whole thing is that there will be additional residences displaced by this," Kulaas said. "There will be major displacements and that bothers me. We have to be careful to help those citizens out as much as possible."

Property owners displaced by the road would be paid for their land and homes, he said.

Loss of parking and close proximity to park features were other concerns raised during public hearings leading up to the route decision.

The only grassy park area the road would encroach on is south of the Riverfront Center building. The road also would pass through the parking lot next to the ice arena.

Plans call for the Wenatchee Valley Farmers Market, located just north of the ice arena, to be relocated to a spot just east of the ice arena.

John McQuaig, owner of the Riverfront Center building, said he considers the new road a positive move, even though it will eliminate some parking spaces. McQuaig, who has expressed a desire to construct a second building on land he owns nearby, said he is negotiating with the city to mitigate the impact to his properties and allow for growth.

"I'm not thrilled about it, but it will be a workable situation," he said. "We need some parking on our side of the street as well. We're in discussions with the city on that."

Stalheim said the final road design will probably be done in a way so that the route won't be within the 200-foot shoreline boundary. If any part of the road falls within the boundary area, the city would be required under the state Shoreline Management Act to get a permit for the work, he said.

Former City Commissioner Pat Notter told the City Council at the July 22 meeting that she is pleased the city is building a north-south corridor. The route, though, could be improved, she said.

"I don't like this route as well as keeping it entirely out of the park and cutting this through a neighborhood when the integrity of that group of homes could be protected," Notter said this week.

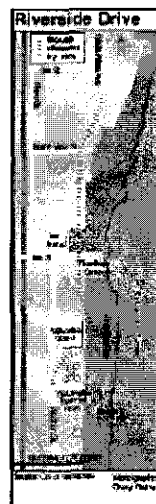
Rocky Crocker, who plays hockey at the ice arena four months out of the year and also bikes and roller blades along the Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail, said he opposes any changes.

Crocker spoke out against the plan at the July council meeting.

"Mainly I'm opposed to spending large quantities of money to improve something I think is already perfect," Crocker said Tuesday. "It's such a beautiful area. I would hate to see that road go through there, but I'm afraid that is what will happen. Developers and property owners want to make sales. Their voice is a lot stronger than mine."

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Study sheds more light on businesses along couplet

Some say they don't need research to know business is down

Megan Cooley
Staff writer
August 12, 2004

Matt Jankowski doesn't need a study to know that revenues at his Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant have dropped, but he has one now anyway.

The Spokane Valley Business Association released a study Wednesday that shows how businesses along the one-way portion of Sprague Avenue have fared since the Sprague-Appleway couplet was built four years ago. Fifty-five percent of business owners there reported a drop in revenues. That decline averaged 27 percent, the study said.

Jankowski once employed 35 people at the 9512 E. Sprague Ave. eatery, but now he needs only 12 workers. Before the couplet was built, when traffic on Sprague Avenue went two ways, he made \$20,000 a week. Now, he takes in \$10,000, he said.

"If this was my only restaurant, I'd be out of business right now," said Jankowski, who operates six other KFCs. "I'd like to move, but who's going to buy the property?"

The business association commissioned the study from Gonzaga University. It hired a student, Evan Marques, to interview business owners and compile the report under the guidance of Scott Bozman, assistant dean of Gonzaga's School of Business Administration.

Fifty-eight of the 105 business owners interviewed reported a drop in revenues since the couplet was built. Twenty-two businesses, most automobile dealerships or car-related companies, said sales either stayed the same or went up, by 10 percent on average.

Convenience-type establishments such as fast-food restaurants have been hit hardest in recent years, the study says. After all, who wants to pull off westbound Sprague on their way to work in the morning for a pot pie and a tub of mashed potatoes? That'd make more sense on the drive home at night, but restaurants such as KFC aren't as visible from eastbound Appleway, Jankowski said.

Regardless of business type, the study found that location within the couplet matters. Revenues at businesses on the north side of Sprague are down twice as much as they are on the south side, which is more visible from Appleway. Stores situated near the automobile dealerships benefit from the traffic Auto Row brings to the area.

Audience members at the business association's meeting Wednesday pointed out one sector left out of the study: businesses that have left Sprague Avenue for Sullivan Road and other locations closer to the Spokane Valley Mall.



It's lunchtime on a Wednesday afternoon and Kayla Smith cleans the tables in a nearly empty Kentucky Fried Chicken at 9512 East Sprague. (Liz Kishimoto/The Spokesman-Review)

Online

Couplet report

The entire report, called the "Gonzaga Economic Study of Sprague Avenue Businesses and Property Owners," can be read online at www.svba.us.

"That's a fact. It happened," Spokane Valley City Councilman Richard Munson said. "I'm afraid in my mind your report has lost some credibility because you haven't mentioned that."

Marques said that wasn't within the scope of his work. He was hired to quantify the performance of businesses located on Sprague between Fancher and University roads.

The study also didn't quantify how the sour economy of the past few years has affected businesses and how these companies were performing between the time the Spokane Valley Mall and the couplet were built. Planning Commission Chairman Bill Gothmann said the study shows the businesses' struggles, but it doesn't clearly identify a cause.

Marques didn't interview business owners who'd closed their doors completely since the couplet, and some business owners declined an interview with him if they had moved to Sprague after the couplet was built.

The City Council has commissioned a professional study that will delve into more of those issues. It plans to decide by December what to do with the Sprague-Appleway couplet. The council is considering extending the couplet two miles eastward either as two one-way roads or as a one-way Appleway and a one-way Sprague between University and Thierman and a two-way Sprague east of University.

A separate organization of business people supports extending the couplet eastward, as Spokane County had planned to do eventually when it constructed the existing segment.

But the Spokane Valley Business Association has been vocal about its support for converting Sprague back to two-way traffic between University and Thierman.

"Every single day we cuss that street," business association Treasurer Dick Behm said.

Sixty-eight percent of the study's respondents favored converting Sprague back to a two-way road.

Some people at Wednesday's meeting said the future of the Sprague corridor will depend on whether University City Shopping Center – once the Valley's main gathering place – is revitalized. The complex is undergoing some renovations now, but some doubted that it will ever play the important role it once did.

Gothmann was optimistic, though, that a lively city center could become reality one day.

"There are ways we can do this, even though it may be on one-way roads," he said.



The Herald - Everett, Wash. - www.HeraldNet.com

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Clear sailing on State Ave.

All lanes of Marysville thoroughfare are expected to be open by Friday

Herald staff

MARYSVILLE - Commuters can finally drive the length of State Avenue in Marysville.

The busy thoroughfare opened to through traffic on Tuesday, ending 10 months of construction.

Final touches are being made to the downtown area, the last of three phases of a \$6.4 million construction project that extends from First to Grove streets.

For now, at least three of five lanes can be used in the downtown stretch. By Friday, all five lanes will be in open, said Doug Buell, a city spokesman.

It's welcome news for merchants, said Karen Thomas, a clerk at Hilton Pharmacy. The last phase of construction was in front of the pharmacy.

"Traffic is moving again," she said. "It's like it never happened. That's what we want to see."

The road repairs and utility improvements were difficult for some businesses, but the project will help revitalize downtown, Thomas said.

There will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 9 a.m. Friday at Third Street and State Avenue. Speakers will include Mayor Dennis Kendall, U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, and Steve Corcester, executive director of the state Transportation Improvement Board.

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It's a Rough Road for Yakima Streets

By **BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS**
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

One quarter of Yakima's major streets — 33 miles in all — are in such bad shape they will need to be completely rebuilt or evened out and repaved, according to a recent study by the city of Yakima.

That's no surprise to residents who complain about potholes and even file claims for damage to their cars.

But Yakima residents may have a chance to do something about it by paying extra taxes devoted to routine street maintenance.



SANDY SUMMERS/Yakima Herald-Republic
Marc Hartman, left, helps move a new telephone pole into place as part of construction on Mead Avenue on Monday morning.

Much of the street damage, the report stated, could have been prevented with treatments, including filling cracks with liquid asphalt and then sealing the streets with oil and chipped gravel.

The city needs \$1.6 million more annually to do that type of work. In 2004, the city's budget for street maintenance, which includes sidewalk repair, was \$2.9 million.

To shore up the difference, the council decided last year to dedicate revenue from the second Real Estate Excise Tax — \$450,000 annually — to streets, likely splitting the funds between routine maintenance and street reconstruction. The state will match money a city is willing to invest in reconstruction exponentially, so the city likes to have funds on hand to leverage with the state.

The city was considering adding a 10 percent utility tax on the stormwater management program the city will likely adopt this year to raise money for streets. Council and staff decided against it, reasoning that the potential revenue — \$63,200 in the first year and eventually maxing out at \$219,300 — wasn't enough to risk the public's ire for creating a new tax.



In the meantime, city staff put together a report detailing the gap between revenue for streets and the real cost of work the city should be doing to protect streets.

SANDY SUMMERS/Yakima Herald-Republic
Ray Rasmussen, 90, moves the sprinkler hose in yard near Mead Avenue.

As the season grows near to create next year's budget, city staff, elected officials, and the new community budget strategy team are considering ways to pay for future maintenance.

Among the options is a 3 percent increase on public utility taxes, which would raise \$480,000 annually. The council could pass this tax with no public vote.

Another option would be increasing private utility taxes by 1 percent, which would require a public vote and would raise \$800,000 annually.

Industry standards dictate covering asphalt roads with protective coatings — what's called chip seal — every eight to 10 years. But due to lack of funding, the city has slowed routine maintenance over the last several years.

At the rate the city is now coating streets, the city will treat each of its major streets — such as Tieton Drive and Summitview Avenue — about every 40 years and residential side streets every 50 years, according to Shelley Willson, Yakima's street and transportation manager.

Of course, the streets will buckle and crack long before that, at which point the city can ask the state to help pay for a costly rebuild at \$600,000 a mile compared with the \$30,000 it would have cost per mile to maintain the streets every eight to 10 years.

"It's a bad use of taxpayers' money," Councilman Neil McClure said Wednesday.

The state's system, however, promotes the paradox: The state won't pay for the less expensive street maintenance, but will pay millions to fully reconstruct a road, McClure said.

The city can only work on Mead and Washington avenues this year, and is doing so with the help of state funds. Crews started on Mead earlier this month, widening the street between 11th and 16th avenues. The Washington Avenue project, between 24th and 72nd avenues, started Wednesday. The project — one of the largest in years — will ease the route between West Valley and the Yakima Air Terminal. The city pieced together more than \$6 million in grants from the state for the project that will also widen the two-to-three-lane road to four and five lanes, add curbs, gutters, sidewalks and lighting.

McClure plans to pressure the state Legislature to fund maintenance through his involvement with the state's Transportation Improvement Board.

Meanwhile, the city may look to the public to help fund more annual maintenance.

Many of the council members are looking to the recently formed community budget advisory group for answers. The city formed the team to help the city

make tough budget decisions in the event that Tim Eyman's latest tax-cutting initiative had passed. The measure, which failed to garner enough support to get on the ballot, would have cut property taxes by 25 percent.

However, the budget team is still focused on cutting the budget. Rita Anson, the city's finance director, said many hope the group will be willing to discuss ways to generate revenue, too. The team will discuss streets and other public works projects next month.

Councilman Dave Edler said the success of other upcoming tax initiatives may determine whether he supports a utility tax for streets. Yakima County is seeking a three-tenths sales tax to pay for criminal justice at the county and city levels. It will likely be on the ballot this November.

"It's a great gauge to see into the heart of this community and what's important to them" and if they're willing to pay more for the basics, he said, such as "adequate police protection" and streets.

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Marysville

Improved State of affairs for road

By Peyton Whitely

Times Snohomish County bureau

The message imprinted on the yellow ribbon was special yet subtle.

"Celebrating the new State of Marysville," it said.

The tape, the kind that usually says "caution" or "police line," stretched across State Avenue at Third Street as a symbol to mark the official completion of a major road project.

The road reopened Friday after 10 months of construction. The work on State, the city's main north-south route, had left many businesses struggling, and its completion brought immense relief.

"We built it, and we're waiting for everyone to come back down State, back down Third," Mayor Dennis Kendall said just before he cut the ribbon. "This project stands as one of the most significant urban-design projects ever undertaken in the city of Marysville."

Work on the \$6.4 million effort started last fall, but the origins dated to 1998 and before, as conditions on the street became increasingly intolerable. The route once was the main road to Everett and even Canada, but was bypassed by the construction of Interstate 5 a few blocks to the west, leaving the avenue a swath of broken pavement, sporadic sidewalks and ugly utility poles.

The new work stretches from First to Grove streets, taking in the main part of the downtown area, and presents a vista of fresh paving, new sidewalks and old-fashioned streetlights bearing hanging baskets filled with flowers. The utility wires have been put underground.

Kendall said it is hoped that the project, along with the building of a waterfront park on Ebey Slough, will spur revitalization of downtown.

"I've got to tell you, Marysville never looked better," said Steve Gorcester, the executive director of the state Transportation Improvement Board. "It sends a message: 'Don't hurry through, stop, take a walk and shop.'"

The board provided \$1.7 million for the work, with about \$4.7 million coming from the city and \$114,000 from the Federal Highway Administration.

Business owners expressed particular relief that the work is done.

"It makes me proud to be a businessman in Marysville today," said Daryn Bundy, the owner of Bundy Carpets, who spoke in behalf of business operators.

Marysville, he added, has a "signature look."

About a half-hour later, crews began removing orange barrels that had closed the street, and shortly after, cars started moving along the road.

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The Arlington Times

Community celebrates 172nd overpass groundbreaking

Bi-partisan VIP list reflects cooperative effort

Steve Stav

The Arlington Times

SMOKEY POINT — A late-summer downpour couldn't dampen the spirits of dozens gathered at Smokey Point's Hawthorne Suites Aug. 21 for the 172nd Street overpass groundbreaking ceremony.

Almost everyone involved in the project was present or represented at the gala affair, which not only celebrated the end of a long struggle, it cheered the bi-partisan efforts needed to renovate a badly outdated section of roadway.

"I hope you appreciate the uniqueness of the situation," said Snohomish County Councilman John Koster, a Republican. "You have all the different levels of government pulling in the same direction for the benefit of everyone, something truly refreshing in the political climate we're in today."

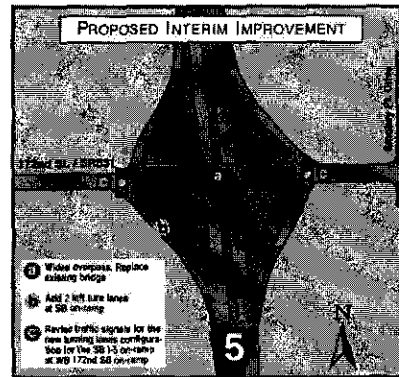
Koster was one of many politicians — both Republican and Democrat — sitting elbow to elbow at the front of one of Hawthorne's reception rooms, while still more state and local officials mingled with construction managers and interested residents in the standing-room-only audience.

Former Marysville Arlington Transportation Relief Plan co-chair Harvey Eichenfeld emceed the event, backed by current co-chairs Gigi Burke and Becky Foster. Eichenfeld sold his Smokey Point copy and shipping business and moved out of state last spring; he is now in the process of being accepted for a state department position. Early on in his remarks, Eichenfeld recognized former Arlington City Councilman Oliver Smith for his impetus and foresight in creating TRAP.

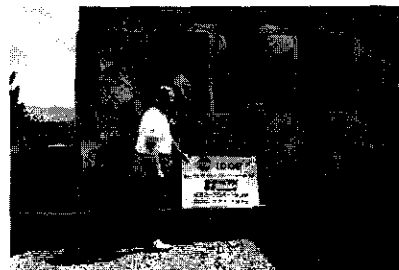
One by one, the emcee introduced the party's special guests, who each took turns at the microphone.

"Some projects kind of 'fight' you," said State Transportation Improvement Board Chairman Steve Gorcester, "and this one, in terms of putting a funding package together, has fought us. But it won't fight us during construction," he promised.

The TIB's grant, a total of \$3.7 million, was crucial to the project. He referred to the fact that this construction — now underway and expected to be completed in fall or winter of



(Click on image to enlarge)



(Click on image to enlarge)

Arlington City Engineer Paul Richart, left, accepts a plaque of appreciation from TRAP co-chair Gigi Burke and former TRAP co-chair Harvey Eichenfeld. Richart acted as a liaison between federal, state and local municipalities and agencies, which was instrumental in securing funds for the 172nd overpass renovation.

TONY DONDERO The Arlington Times

2005 — to be only the first phase of a \$26 million complete overhaul of the obsolete structure.

"This is an interim solution, a good intermediate step that will make a difference to the area," Gorcester explained. "We were highly motivated to fund this project. The TRAP group was right all along — this is a project that needs to go forward and, thankfully, now it will."

Phase one consists of adding three lanes to the overpass while the two existing lanes will remain open. Improved lights and signage are also part of the plan, which will conclude with the demolition of the old bridge.

Senator Patty Murray, who helped secure \$3 million in Federal funds for the project, said, "I know how important this project is for job creation and the economic development of this area, and it's clearly important for the safety and quality of life for residents here.

"I am very proud to have been a partner in this," she added. "I'm proud to have been able to go to bat for this in the United States Senate."

Her counterpart in the House, Rep. Rick Larsen, echoed Murray's statements on safety and economic concerns, adding, "When Gigi, Harvey and Becky call, you might as well say yes, because you're going wind up saying yes anyway.

"These projects don't happen without a concerted community effort," he continued. "This project kept coming back, saying, 'Pay attention to us.' It took on a life of its own."

Larsen pointed out former Arlington Mayor Bob Kraski's contributions to the project, and "Koster's banging the drum at the local level."

Kraski, who was present at the ceremony, presented letters of local support for the project to Larsen and Murray in Washington, D.C. in July 2003.

Other speakers included State Senator Mary Margaret Haugen (D-10th), State Rep. Val Stevens (R-39th), and State Department of Transportation — Snohomish County Director Lorena Eng.

Toward the end of the ceremony, Burke, Eichenfeld and Foster surprised Arlington City Engineer Paul Richart with a plaque of appreciation for his role in securing funds for the project.

Among other duties, Richart co-wrote the TIB grant application.

"I'm very proud of him," Arlington Mayor Margaret Larson said Aug. 23. "He worked really hard for this project, and he represented the city very well. He made complicated aspects of the financing and other issues so clear to the City Council, and to myself."

Due to a prior commitment that she could not break, Larson did not attend the ceremony; Mayor Pro Tem Sally Lien filled in for her with a brief speech.

Larsen's ally in Marysville, Mayor Dennis Kendall, invited the audience to drive down Marysville's newly revamped State Avenue. He also thanked his Council for making the decision to include Marysville in the project.

"Some have asked, 'Why would Marysville put money into an overpass in Arlington?'" Kendall said, "Well, believe it or not, from 164th Street southwards belongs to Marysville, and there's going to be land utilized there. Without this project, it would be extremely difficult for customers and those who are going to work there to get to these [new businesses]."

Referring to the late-1990s Smokey Point annexation battles between Marysville and its cousin to the north, Kendall wryly said, "I understand that we've had some troubles years ago, but my philosophy is what happened in the past stays in the past and let's get done now what needs to be done."

It was inevitable that someone would mention NASCAR in his or her address to the room. Surprisingly, it took a half an hour for the debate to be mentioned.

"We need more community projects like this," urged State Rep. John McCoy ((D-38th). "We need TRAP to stay alive and well, because regardless of whether you're friend or foe of ISC, we have a lot of work to get done whether a racetrack comes or not." McCoy, a prominent member of the Tulalip Tribes, pointed to exit No. 202 at 116th Northeast — an entranceway into the Tribes' and Marysville's retail corridors — as another overpass project in need of funds.

Councilman Koster, introduced by Eichenfeld as an example of "government truly representing the people," concluded the ceremony by remarking, "I don't know how many of you folks traverse through this intersection every day, but I try to avoid it. It's so bad. This renovation will do so much for the economic vitality of the area.

"In the coming months," he added, "as construction takes place out here, we need to remind the citizens that things are going to get tougher before they get better. I say that not only for their own safety, but for the safety of the guys that have to work out there every day, as well."

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Celebrating Skagit Station

By BEVERLY CRICHFIELD

Dedication ceremony tinged with political tension

MOUNT VERNON - After a decade of planning and months of political wrangling, the much-anticipated Skagit Station is open for business — although the city still has not signed leases with prospective tenants.

About 200 people gathered Tuesday afternoon to celebrate the dedication of the new \$7.7 million transit center designed as the future home of Greyhound bus service, Skagit Transit, Amtrak and the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce.

About half of the crowd was made up of local, state and federal lawmakers, Amtrak officials, leaders of other Skagit County cities and Skagit County commissioners.

They slowly toured the 6,600-square-foot building, a project that has raised its share of controversy in the past year. Some of those in attendance used the event as a chance to campaign for upcoming elections.

Most seemed to agree that the project is a major boost for mass transit and the region's economy.

"I know that transportation investments stimulate our economy, create good family-wage jobs and enhance the lifestyles of the people of our community," U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., told the crowd that gathered under tents to escape the rain.

"This project has played a huge part in the development of transportation choices that are coming north," said state Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen, D-Camano Island. Both Murray and Haugen lobbied for federal and state transportation dollars to help pay for the station. About 93 percent of the project budget came from federal and state money.

Members of the community and local transportation advocates sifted through the spacious lobby, where the Skagit Transit and Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce offices will be located.

Others sauntered around the 1,800-square-foot carpeted meeting room on the north end of the building, pointing at several aerial photographs depicting traffic congestion in the Interstate 5 corridor through Burlington and Mount Vernon.

Bonnie Anderson, director of the Downtown Business Community of Mount Vernon, said the station is another great tool to bring shoppers downtown.



Frank Varga / Skagit Valley Herald
Former Mount Vernon Mayor Skye Richendrfer (center) shares the history of the Skagit Station project Tuesday afternoon with U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Wash., who attended the dedication ceremony for the new station. Richendrfer is credited with getting the project completed.

She said she's planning to put a kiosk outside the station on the north and south ends that direct people to nearby shops and restaurants. Despite the ceremony's generally upbeat and enthusiastic tenor, there remained one major hitch — the station still doesn't have any tenants.



Former Mayor Skye Richendrfer, who took much of the credit for Skagit Station, urged city leaders in the crowd to sign leases with tenants. Richendrfer hadn't completed negotiations with possible tenants before he was ousted by Bud Norris in the 2003 mayoral election.

Several hundred people gathered Tuesday in downtown Mount Vernon to dedicate the new Skagit Station, which is expected to house Greyhound bus service, Amtrak, Skagit Transit and the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce.

Skagit County Commissioner Don Munks, who attended Tuesday's event, said the leases should have been signed long before construction began. He was not a supporter of placing the transit center downtown.

"Hopefully it's functional, gets filled and meets the needs of the community," Munks said. "If I would have done the project, I would have had the contracts signed up in advance."

The city is negotiating with potential tenants of the center, said Eric Stendal, city administrative officer.

Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce Director Kristin Whitener said city leaders and chamber board members are dickering over the chamber's share of the maintenance and operations costs.

Stendal estimates maintenance and operations, including utilities, insurance, janitorial services and landscaping, will cost the city about \$77,000 per year if all the building space is rented. Each tenant is being asked to pay a share of that, Stendal said.

While most speakers focused on partnership, Richendrfer couldn't resist aiming some barbs at critics of the station project.

"Here we sit in 2004 and efforts to derail the project thankfully were unsuccessful — or should I say derailed," said Richendrfer, referring to Mayor Bud Norris' attempts to look at moving the station or selling it.

"It doesn't look much like a jail," Richendrfer continued.

Norris has opposed the transit center since it was proposed for the downtown site in 1999. He has said the site poses a traffic hazard and doesn't provide enough parking.

The transit center became the linchpin of Norris' campaign last fall. He promised voters he would consider either not finishing the station or selling it if he were elected.

Some downtown business owners at the time joked that Norris wanted to sell the station to Skagit County to expand the jail.

Two months after Norris was elected, he asked the City Council to stop construction on the project and move it. The council voted instead to finish the station.

Norris said little about the station in his welcoming speech. He thanked state and federal leaders for their help and praised the partnership among local, state and federal officials to complete the project.

"It is now our responsibility to make this facility a success," Norris said.

Workers still have about three weeks of pouring concrete, completing the electrical and heating systems before the building is completed, said Al Steele, city project engineer. Once that work is finished, the Amtrak train should begin stopping at the station.

"We're real excited about this," Steele said with a smile. "It's a great project - a great building."

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OUR VOICE

Kudos to the Chamber for a fantastic Main Street Festival

This past weekend, Ferndale residents were able to see something amazing. In less than four months, the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce planned and organized the Main Street Festival, a event that despite rain, was a huge success.

It wasn't until early May that the chamber was able to get approval from the Ferndale City Council for the \$7,500 from the lodging tax fund with an additional \$2,500 available in early August to help pay for this year's Street Festival.

With little time to prepare, the chamber created a festival that looked like it had been organized more than once for several years. Even though the rain continued to come for most of the day, the festival continued to attract a crowd.

The several craft, food, business and nonprofit vendors provided something for everyone to enjoy.

The festival was an event that added to the many reasons why so many people are flocking to this beautiful community. It also showed the community that the chamber is a large asset to Ferndale's residents and businesses.

On the same day, Mayor Jerry Landcastle emceed the bridge dedication ceremony, announcing the bridge's new name as Pioneer Bridge.

Former and current city employees and Main Street improvement project workers and engineers witnessed the dedication.

The day was fun and provided closure to the long-awaited improvement project.

A job well done



Mayor Jerry Landcastle shakes Ferndale High School band member Michelle Beaulaurier's hand after she and the FHS band marched across the newly dedicated "Pioneer Bridge" Saturday. The band played Colonel Bogey's March and were followed by a parade of show cars.